



Public Transport Users Association Inc.

www.ptua.org.au

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Submission on Tram Improvement Works in Collins Street

Introduction

The Public Transport Users Association wishes to provide feedback on the proposed Collins Street tram changes as part of the 'Think Tram' project.

While the PTUA supports improved passenger facilities at stops and better tram priority at traffic signals, we are opposed to the removal of tram stops from each intersection of the central business district. We believe the proposed changes are not in line with best practice public transport and urban design.

We believe the changes would be against the interests of public transport users.

Objections

The impacts of the proposed plans include:

- The convenience and ease of use of having a stop at each intersection will be removed. Stops at each intersection make for a legible and easy to navigate transport system - particularly for irregular users and visitors to the city, and maximise accessibility to the tram system from side streets.
- The time savings from increased tram speeds will be offset by the increased walking time for many users, with only a minority of passengers who travel the length of Collins Street saving the estimated three minutes travel time.
- It is vital that Melbourne works towards a better integrated public transport network in order to improve patronage and provide a more sustainable transport environment. In particular the proposed changes would eliminate tram stops located at the Queen, Russell and Exhibition Street intersections. These streets carry some of Melbourne's most frequent and busiest bus routes. By impeding quick and simple transfers between modes, the changes will sabotage efforts to better integrate public transport modes in Melbourne.
- The removal of the tram stops at King Street will increase confusion for tourists wanting to visit the Melbourne Observation Deck in the Rialto Towers, a major Melbourne tourist attraction.

A history of bad tram stop design in the city

These proposed changes come after a string of changes in the CBD that have worked against the interests of public transport users. By allowing the closure of stops on Collins Street, a precedent will be set to allow a reduction in stops on other streets, with similar impacts on the travelling public.

In the previous two years we have seen the following bad transport designs:

- The direct tram-train connection between Swanston Street and Melbourne Central Station was closed, forcing thousands of commuters to deviate an extra minute each way, whilst maximizing passing traffic for a retail centre.
- The tram stops on Collins Street near Spencer Street was moved further away from Spencer Street Station. This moved the tram stop out of sight lines with the station, and increased the walking distance for passengers needing to transfer between trams and trains.
- In February, Yarra Trams attempted to close the southbound tram stop at Grattan and Swanston Streets. Grattan Street is not only the site of important hospitals, it also carries the popular 402 bus route. Closing this stop disrupted integration of transport modes and the PTUA is pleased to see the stop has been re-opened.

Principles of good tram stop design

The PTUA believes the following should be taken into account when designing the placement of tram stops in the CBD:

- Tram stops must be located at intersections of the major street grid. This allows maximum pedestrian accessibility from surrounding areas.
- Tram stops must be located at intersections of streets carrying other transport routes of any mode (including buses).
- Tram stops must be located so as to not incur large walking time penalties for a person accessing the tram route from any point within the street. The optimal figure works out as 200 to 300 metres; much more than this is a deterrent to passengers.
- Tram stops must allow ready access from the curb, including pedestrian crossings or equivalent safety measures. They should also be permeable, allowing quick and easy access to the curb for alighting passengers.
- Tram stops should include larger passenger waiting areas to improve loading and unloading efficiency.
- Tram stops must provide accurate customer information, including full timetables and maps to assist users planning journeys.

Response to arguments against retention of tram stops

Argument	PTUA Response
Removal of tram stops will speed up trams along Collins Street	While we support the improvements that speed up tram services, we believe the closure of stops will overly impact users. Alternative measures are available that will achieve greater time savings.

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<p>DDA compliant tram stops cannot be built on steeper sections of Collins Street.</p>	<p>We believe Yarra Trams should research how other tram cities have addressed such issues. We note that other superstops have been constructed on sloping sections of street elsewhere.</p> <p>If the reason for eradication of tram stops is that they cannot be built to DDA compliant specifications, then we ask whether entire sections of the Melbourne tram system would need to be closed down or run express. Clearly this proposition is unworkable.</p> <p>We believe able-bodied users, who comprise the vast majority of passengers, must not be inconvenienced because tram stops cannot be made DDA compliant.</p>
<p>Traffic priority cannot be changed in tram's favour at King Street due to the demands of freight traffic.</p>	<p>We understand there will be no change to the cycle bias at King Street to favour trams. We believe if Melbourne is to see 20% of motorized trips taken on public transport, then public transport services must take priority over private vehicle traffic.</p> <p>Whenever roads are improved to cater for freight, the reality is that private motor vehicles are equally encouraged to make additional trips. Constantly upgrading roads encourages further traffic which creates further congestion, leading to a spiralling cycle of demand for more roads.</p> <p>Vicroads must recognize that congestion is inevitable, and while changing priority at King Street may have a small impact on freight movements, it would also encourage more people to use public transport, thereby reducing peak hour congestion.</p>
<p>Intersections with bus routes were deemed less important for location of tram stops.</p>	<p>Yarra Trams must accept that integration of public transport modes is essential if Melbourne is to see a significant increase in patronage. The proposed changes require bus passengers to walk the length of a city block to transfer to tram services. This is unacceptable and contrary to government policy. The proposed changes reinforce the 'poor cousin' perception of Melbourne's buses.</p>
<p>The provision of tram stops on the Collins Street extension bridge will satisfy users needing to transfer to trains.</p>	<p>While this is true for routes 31 and 42, it does not address the needs of passengers on main-line routes 109 and 112. The suggestion that these passengers might transfer to routes 42 and 31 is unrealistic given the additional waiting time will not be time-competitive in most instances. In addition, route 42 only operates in peak hour.</p>
<p>Fewer tram stops will prevent bunching of trams.</p>	<p>The PTUA is not convinced by this argument. Removal of stops would not change the bunching situation in the city centre. We note that bunching is more likely to occur on inbound peak trips with high patronage, and by the time trams have reached the city centre, bunching would already have occurred. The logic on which this argument is based is that trams would be more efficient if they carried fewer passengers. Bunching is best prevented by making proper use of the dynamic priority system that Yarra Trams and Vicroads have already installed.</p>

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Increased stops reduces car parking for retail customers.	<p>We strongly suggest an assessment be made between the passenger capacity of four parking spots and the passenger capacity of one tram stop. We suggest that providing tram stops is a vastly more efficient use of limited road space than short term on-street shopper parking.</p> <p>Notwithstanding this, the PTUA is in favour of the retention of on-street car parking wherever possible, not least because it provides a buffer zone between pedestrians and moving vehicles and thus improves the walking environment. Loss of car parking can be minimised by locating stops at intersections as per our recommendation.</p>

User feedback received by the PTUA

In February 2005 the PTUA launched a petition calling for stops to be retained. In our interactions with the public, we found most people required no explanation as to why the removal of tram stops was not in their interests. In addition, we note the Herald Sun newspaper is equally unconvinced, as reflected in their editorial of 3 February 2005.

Recommendations

The PTUA recommends the following minimum changes be made to the plans:

1. Existing tram stops at Queen Street, King Street and Russell Street remain open. If they cannot be made platform stops they should be retained as safety zones.
2. The superstops at Exhibition Street and William Street should be located at the street intersection to enable passengers to reach the stops via the signalised pedestrian crossings. This would also maximise ease of transfer with bus services on Exhibition Street.
3. The superstop on Collins Street near Spencer Street be relocated to the intersection of Spencer Street to maximise ease of transfer with Spencer Street station.
4. The project pushes for better tram priority at intersections, including dynamic traffic signal priority and changes to the traffic bias at King Street.

These changes would deliver improved tram travel times and reliability while improving customer facilities and multi-modal integration.

Conclusion

We find it ironic that the title of this project is 'Think Tram'. Clearly this implies the focus of the work is largely around the efficient operation of trams, which delivers Yarra Trams operational cost savings. We believe more focus should be paid to the needs of public transport users.

We believe that improvements to tram speeds, reliability, and passenger amenity can be achieved through enhanced facilities at tram stops, and traffic signal priority for trams at intersections, without the removal of tram stops from street intersections.